

Reps. Peter Welch and Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.) on Thursday launched the bipartisan Congressional Affordable Medicines Caucus. Welch and Emerson cofounded the caucus to garner bipartisan support to make prescription drugs more affordable and rein in skyrocketing health care costs.

On a conference call held Thursday morning, Welch and Emerson said one focus of the caucus will be to pursue legislative initiatives to increase the use of generic prescription drugs. Doing so would save households and government programs like Medicare and Medicaid hundreds of millions of dollars a year. Currently, the average Medicare brand-name prescription drug costs about ten times as much as the generic brand. If Medicaid generic medication use was increased by just one percentage point, Medicaid would save \$682 million in one year. If generic drug use was increased by five percentage points, \$3.4 billion would be saved.

"The goal of this caucus is to save money and to send a signal to our colleagues in the House that we can work together on health care issues," Welch said. "No matter what your view on health care reform is, there is widespread agreement that one priority must be to spend less than we do now. Increasing the use of generic prescription drugs is a good place to start. There are legitimate areas for bipartisan consensus on containing health care costs, and I look forward to working with Rep. Emerson to make progress on these issues."

Welch and Emerson launched the caucus on Thursday and will be recruiting members in the coming weeks.

